

Ursuline Academy, Laundry Building
300 Augusta Street
San Antonio
Bexar County
Texas

HABS No. TX-32-G

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

URSULINE ACADEMY, LAUNDRY BUILDING

HABS No. TX-32-G

Location: 300 Augusta Street, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas.

Present Owner: Link Cowen.

Present Occupant: Vacant.

Significance: This building is one of the minor structures of the Ursuline Academy complex, and its history is unknown. In any event, it appears in some respects to be one of the early buildings and may possibly date from the 1850s.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Although the record is not clear on this matter, there was a house on this land sometime before 1851, and it is believed to have been erected by Erasmo Seguin, which would date it before 1842. However, by the time the Ursuline Sisters arrived on the night of September 14, 1851, the house had been allowed to fall into ruins, for they found this house, which was to serve as their dormitory, infested with spiders and scorpions and without glass in the windows, shingles on the roof or furniture of any sort. They set about repairing the house during the following weeks and apparently lived in it for some years.

It is known that a one-story, T-shaped residential structure occupied the site of the present Priest's house and was razed in the 1880s to make way for the present building. It seems likely that this was the ruined building which the Sisters renovated and used as their first home. However, if this conjecture holds true, then the building considered in this report cannot be accounted for.

In any event, the existing building seems evidently to be residential in character and scale and, indeed, has some characteristics of residences erected in this area during the mid-nineteenth century.

However, the problems in evaluating this building are compounded not only by the lack of recorded data but also by the physical state of the building itself, for the present building is the result of at least one major renovation ca. 1910 and possibly one or more prior to that date.

In ca. 1910 the Ursulines undertook a major expansion and renovation program, and it appears that this building was changed at that time into a laundry. The original floor plan was altered either at that date or possibly earlier and, therefore, is lost

and not available for use in determining a date-period. It is interesting to note, however, that the plan of the existing perimeter walls is definitely out of square. Although this condition may be expected in any period if careless mechanics are employed, it, nevertheless, may indicate an early date of construction undertaken by persons either careless or ignorant of the method for laying out right angles.

Another curious feature about the building is the variety of techniques in constructing the walls. Those on the north and east are rubble limestone of varying size blocks. Where the stucco has fallen away, it may be observed that small scraps were used to fill in the interstices. These walls were stuccoed originally with a thin, white, lime coating or whitewash.

The south or rear wall, however, was constructed of dressed coursed limestone rubble and obviously was built with more care. Originally, this wall was also stuccoed but with a sandy brown coat, most of which has now disappeared. The blocks are uniform in size, color, texture and tooling and are well laid in mortar joints.

This rear wall, furthermore, appears datable. It continues toward the east and serves also as the rear wall for the east ell, which adjoins the west end wall of the 1872 House (HABS No. TX-32-F). The roof structure of the ell reveals no evidence of having been altered; the framing members abut the west wall of the 1872 House, indicating that the roof of the ell was constructed after 1872. This date is supported by the following piece of evidence: an upper window was constructed in the west wall of the 1872 House, and this window, now bricked-in, opens into the attic of the ell. It is not probable that this was the original intent of the designer and, therefore, the ell structure must be dated after 1872.

Further complexity is encountered at the northeast corner of the building which was constructed of very soft, white ashlar, limestone blocks. This stone is soft to the touch and readily crumbles away.

Turning this corner brings up the east wall, which appears to be stone up to the window sill; however, it is covered with a hard coat of what appears to be Portland cement stucco. On the other hand, the upper portion of this wall, including that part extending over the doorway, is of "rammed earth," in this case a heavy clay soil.

Obviously some basic changes have occurred in this building, but only a thorough study of the fabric will make possible their chronology. It seems apparent, also, that the entire roof structure has been replaced.

- B. Historical Context: See History section of the Ursuline Academy, HABS No. TX-32, for general history of the Academy.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The house is one and a half stories high, nearly square in shape except for the west wall which is out of square, making the southwest corner acute and the northwest corner oblique. A long, narrow, one-story ell adjoins at the southeast corner and extends eastward. With its low sloping gabled roof with two small windows in the gable, the north facade is a characteristic European type found in Texas. A one-story porch extends across the east and north facades.
2. Condition of fabric: Because of neglect by the present owner, the condition of the building is poor. Walls are fast deteriorating; plaster is falling away; and the mortar is powdery, having lost its cohesiveness. Recent vandalism has resulted in the destruction of doors and windows.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 37 feet deep, 37 feet across the south facade, 33 feet across the north; the east ell is approximately 21 feet wide and 51 feet long; all dimensions exclude porches.
2. Foundation: Rubble limestone laid in lime mortar.
3. Walls: Walls of this building and the ell present a complex situation to the casual observer. It is not readily apparent as to the original state of all of the walls nor the sequence of alterations.

For the most part, the walls are rubble limestone. On the south facade, where the stone is dressed coursed rubble work, the blocks are relatively uniform in size. However, where the coating has deteriorated on the plastered or stuccoed walls making their composition visible, their construction appears to be chiefly of rubble limestone, varying in size, type of limestone

and finish of block. Some of the blocks appear dressed, others seem to be field stones or scraps, and others, chips and scraps used to fill in voids before stuccoing.

The short east wall of the story-and-a-half building is packed earth of a heavy clay consistency set back on a base wall which appears to be of stone.

All of the walls are shouldered on the interior, that is, they are carried full thickness to a height of approximately 6 feet then reduced or off-set several inches and carried up to their full height.

The following is the sequence of exterior color from original to present: lime whitewash, grey stucco, gray coating (slightly lighter than grey stucco), deep pink coating, and sandy brown coating.

4. Structural system, framing: Load bearing exterior walls. The ceiling system is wood joists. The interior walls are gutted. The present roof is supported by timber trusses and posts with bolsters in the story-and-a-half building.
5. Porches: One-story wood framed porch extends across the west, north and east facades and is supported by plain wood posts. These posts are greatly deteriorated at this time.
6. Chimneys: A small chimney on both the north and south gable walls and one similar near east end of east ell; integral with walls; brick on the north and stone on the south.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Two doorways in north facade of house: wood doors, four lights over two molded panels. Doorway in east facade: double wood door, three lights each side and molded panel below. Doorway in west facade: wood door, four lights, two panels below. Two doorways in south facade: one, wood door, four lights, two panels below; the other, double wood door, ten lights each side.

One exterior doorway on south facade of east ell and one on north.
 - b. Windows: Two windows flank the west door: 3'-0" wide, wood casements, four lights each panel. One opening on east facade filled with two pair of wood casement windows, four lights each panel. One opening on north facade: 2'-8" wide, double-hung wood sash, 6/6 light. Two openings above in gable wall: 2'-4" wide, six lights, single hung wood sash, and one similar in south gable.

Two windows in north facade of east ell, three in south facade, some double-hung, some wood casement.

8. Roof: Roof: gabled; standing-seam, metal covering. The ell was originally shingled with rough slab nailers.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: Two frame partitions which appear to have been later additions divide the ell into three rooms, while the story-and-a-half building has apparently had its original partitions removed, for it is now one large space.
2. Flooring: The floor of the story-and-a-half building is modern reinforced concrete. Those in the ell are tongue-and-groove boards apparently laid on wood sleepers which were laid on the underlying soil. In the eastern part of the ell, the attic floor is intact (it has been removed in the western part) and is also of tongue-and-groove boards.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are plastered and painted ocher at present. There are no ceilings except in the eastern part of the ell which at present is locked and inaccessible.
4. Doorways and doors: One interior doorway leading into east ell: wood, four-panel door, plain trim.
5. Hardware: Various, some rim locks.
6. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Lighting: Bare incandescent bulbs.
 - b. Heating: Originally fireplaces, now blocked up.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces west with the long ell running east to west. Located at the southeastern corner of the complex, these structures adjoin the west wall of a two-story stone building erected in 1872. They parallel the San Antonio River which is just south of the site and at present front onto an unattractive asphalt parking lot.

Prepared by: John C. Garner, Jr.
Director, Bexar County Architecture Survey
December 13, 1968

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The San Antonio project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in the summer of 1968, and was made possible with funds from HABS and two sponsors, the Bexar County Historical Survey Committee and the San Antonio Conservation Society. Under the direction of James Massey, Chief of HABS, the project was carried out by Wesley I. Shank (Iowa State University), project supervisor, and by student assistant architects, Charles W. Barrow (University of Texas); Les Beilinson (University of Miami); William H. Edwards (University of Illinois); and Larry D. Hermsen (Iowa State University) at the HABS field office in the former Ursuline Academy buildings, San Antonio. John C. Garner, Jr., Director of Bexar County Architecture Survey, did the outside work on the written documentaries. Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, edited the written data in 1983, for preparation of transmittal to the Library of Congress. Dewey G. Mears of Austin, Texas took the documentary photographs of the San Antonio structures.